

# DEAR DURGA

A Mom's Guide to Activate  
Courage and Emerge Victorious

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**BALBOA**.PRESS  
A DIVISION OF HAY HOUSE



# CHAPTER 1

## *Show Time: Demonstrating Courage*



### **Courage: A Rap Song by Shanita**

Courage is a feeling revealing healing.  
It starts in yo body and goes beyond the ceiling.  
Wisdom in ya spiritual system,  
One of a kind, made for humankind.  
Courage is a mindset that you won't forget.  
Pure alignment, pure refinement.  
It's a behavior, could be your savior  
Protecting you from all the stranger danger.  
Courage is a practice when fears distract us.  
An unflawed squad, God or no God.  
An attitude of magnitude renewed by gratitude—  
Ya get VIP access in solitude.  
Courage is a lifestyle, so fertile.  
Worthwhile strength on speed dial.  
It is mystic, alchemistic, altruistic, and realistic.  
Courage is your song, reminding, "You belong."  
"Hey DJ keep playing my song, all night, on and on and on."  
Courage is an energy, inner liberty.

Shanita Liu

A dance or prance or stance lookin' pretty,  
Or a no-frills skill, driven by your will to fulfill.  
Daaang, what a thrill.  
Courage is I-I-I-I-I-love,  
The kind of love that you'll never get sick of.  
It's a bearhug squeeze,  
Cozy, full of ease,  
It don't charge fees.  
Can I get another round, please?

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Dear Durga,

*I had no idea that you were waiting for me in India. That's why I was supposed to go. Take the risk. Break open. And collect you in the shape of a postcard. You're so clever. You were staring at me in your regal beauty. You were offering me some magic and hope before I even considered those concepts to be regular staples in my life. You even had all the other gods with you as if it was a summoning to Shanita. A royal welcome of sorts. I was so lost with my brain scattered everywhere. And my heart barely holding up because it was already so broken. I didn't even give you the acknowledgment that you deserved. I'm sorry.*

*You were so beautiful and captivating. And that's why I picked you up. I don't know who the artist is of that postcard, but I thank him, her, or them. I wish I didn't shove you in the pile of international collectibles or stick you in a bin in my attic. I think I recall uncovering you and having you on my bookshelf. Why didn't I take a closer look? Or feel your vibration? If only I would have tuned in sooner. If only I paused to see what the higher calling was.*

Dear Durga

*I'm sorry. Please forgive me. In fact, I know you already forgave me. That's why you're here. You and I were meant to ride this tiger together in this lifetime. I love you, Maa.*

Love, Me

## Discovering Durga

When I was a confused 19-year-old in college struggling to understand my ethnic identities, I applied to study a semester abroad in my motherland, India. My intention: Follow an inkling to live in a foreign country for four months so that I can find myself. It seemed straightforward enough; at least, that's how it worked in American movies.

I am a first-generation Indo-Guyanese American, but I wasn't quite clear on what any of my hyphenated identities meant. I grew up mostly Americanized; fond memories of "The Hoff" and Madonna wearing her pink satin gloves on MTV come to mind. I became reasonably aware of my Guyanese heritage by smelling sizzling butter-toasted platt bread crisping on my mom's towa, nom-nomming Nani's chicken curry and using my dhal pouri to sop up any leftover gravy, perilously picking stems off of red-hot wri wri peppa for homemade peppa sauce, whining to Terry Gajraj's & Apache Waria's soca-chutney hit "Tun Tun," and listening to my relatives gyaff about "back home," the phrase every family member started with before they reminisced about their lives prior to immigrating to the States.

However, I was particularly lost in the sauce when it came to understanding how I fit into the Indian diaspora. I couldn't grasp what the "Indo" meant. I looked Indian, I prayed to Hindu gods and lit diyas for Diwali (albeit without comprehending much of what I did and why I did it), I wore colorful lenghas

with matching bangles for jandis, I accompanied my mom to Jackson Heights aka Little India for groceries and gold jewelry, I watched ITV's Saturday morning Bollywood tunes—yet I remained puzzled. Was there something else that I was supposed to know to glue all the pieces of my Indian identity together? And why did I feel the nudge to move 7,000 miles away from home to find out?

Fast-forward to me meandering throughout the greatest tourist trap that Indians ever invented—a souvenir shop. These stores made me feel like a kid in a candy store, minus the candy and accurate price tags. Every week I'd take the few rupees I had from my sweaty money belt to go on shopping sprees. I haggled like my life depended on it; I compulsively purchased pairs of earrings, sequined handbags, and baby elephant trinkets. I suppose that my routine of retail therapy was a means to soothe my homesickness. I suspect that I was also trying to find whatever was supposed to lead me to my purpose in India.

One late afternoon during a class field trip, I ended up in a souvenir shop (insert surprised face emoji). I wasn't into postcards, and by no means did I want to deal with sending one from the jam-packed Jaipur post office, but there I was, standing before a standing wire rack roughly 5 feet tall filled with 4" x 6" postcards. Iconic images of the Hawa Mahal aka the Pink Palace, the Taj Mahal, and the Lotus Temple were on display. When I looked a little lower towards the bottom racks, I noticed a row of cards featuring Hindu gods and goddesses. I recognized major deities like Ganesha, the elephant-headed remover of obstacles and lord of beginnings, and Krishna, the blue-skinned flute-playing god of love, because their murtis sat on my mom's altar shelves. I knew them from since I was a little girl, and I know that they knew me—so I grabbed two of their cards as keepsakes.

Then, I noticed a postcard unlike any I'd ever seen. I slowly bent down to pick it up with my right hand and stare—not only because it was fascinating, but because I'm nearsighted and can't make out details when images are far away.

The backdrop illustration included outer-space features—a pitch-black atmosphere filled with twinkling stars. There were two Om symbols made out of brass hanging from the left and right sides of the sky. In the middle, a pink lotus-like design bordered a golden circular ring ornamented with teardrop-shaped red and green gems. Even though the picture glimmered and glowed, the vibe was serene.

The central image was nothing short of stunning; I saw an epic gold crown, kind brown eyes, closed-mouth smile, bubblegum-pink sari, eight hands armed with weapons, and a ferocious tiger. They all belonged to a warrior who did everything right to save the universe from everything wrong; who demonstrated the power of female potential, proving that feminine genius was a prerequisite for balancing masculine ability; who creatively conjured up incarnations to restore peace when the world fell to pieces; who was staring right at me. The one and only, Durga Maa.

## Who's Durga?

The word *Durga* means “invincible, unassailable” and comes from the Sanskrit word *Durg*, which means “fortress, something difficult to defeat or pass.” *Durga* is also referred to as *Devi Durga*, *Durga Maa*, *Durgatinashini*, and *Divine Shakti*.

When I acknowledge the victorious nature of *Durga*, I proudly say, “*Jai Maa*.” It translates to “victory to the divine feminine,” and is one of the most popular phrases used to venerate the supreme mother. Although you'll hear me lovingly refer to *Durga* as *Maa* throughout the book, the term *Maa* is

also used to revere an extensive gamut of maternal Hindu goddesses. In this context, Maa signifies a nurturing mother who serves to protect her children and shower them with blessings.

Durga is the OG slayer—Buffy can’t compare to Maa’s level of gangsta and street cred when it comes to destroying evil. In *Durga the Demon-Slayer*, Indian writer and artist Sarada Thompson captures Durga’s origin:

“Goddess Durga emerged from the combined energies of Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver), and Shiva (the Destroyer), in order to battle the demon Mahishasura, who was awarded the special privilege to be invulnerable to man and God. The presence of feminine energy synthesised into the form of a radiantly beautiful woman who filled every direction with her light to overcome the demon who caused much destruction in all the three worlds—Earth, Heaven and Nether Worlds.”

I’m not sure why anyone would assume that a male with unlimited power could be trusted. If I were a deity, I’d think twice about granting “special privileges” to anyone. Unsurprisingly, the escalated situation required a feminine authority to take care of business—a divinity equipped with the jackpot of powers from Hinduism’s trimurti, or holy trinity of deities (Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva) who personified the top cosmic functions of the universe.

Durga’s remarkable profile doesn’t end there. Maa rides a tiger, which illustrates her possession of unlimited power and her intention to use it for good. Durga also has three eyes and ten arms that hold weapons gifted to her by the gods. Some of these include a sword, a discus, a bow and arrow, a

trident, a club, an axe, and a spear. Her depictions and symbols vary across ancient Hindu stories—some visuals alternatively show Durga riding a lion; having fewer or infinite arms; and/or holding other items in her hands, such as a lotus, conch shell, thunderbolt, or snake.



Image of Durga Maa and her symbols. **Center:** Durga Maa. **Center left:** Abhaya Mudra (blessing palm); **Center bottom:** Tiger (courage and power); **Center right:** Half-bloomed Lotus; **Upper left:** Sudarshan Chakra (flying disk); **Left:** Khanda (sword); **Lower left:** Bow and Arrow; **Upper right:** Shankh (conch shell); **Right:** Trishul (trident); **Lower right:** Gada (mallet/mace)

Back to the battle. Durga endured a ten-day war to defeat Mahishasura, the cruel and colossal monster who kept changing his forms. Can you seriously imagine having to be on guard 24/7 dealing with a deceiving demon for ten days straight? To keep up with this confusing clown, Durga changed her forms, too—she incarnated into nine different goddesses with unique powers. When Mahishasura finally took the form of a buffalo, Durga stabbed his chest with her trishul and killed him. Cheers to restored world peace!